mitzvah
THE MITZVAH MOVEMENT
WEDNESDAY NIGHT TORAH STUDY

GENESIS CHAPTERS 1 AND 2 · OCTOBER 14, 2026

Two Stories, One Soul

The builder, the seeker, and the breath of God inside you

Tonight's question: Why does the Torah tell the story of creation twice — and which of the two people is you?

INTRODUCTION

How to Use This Workbook

Last week we stayed inside Genesis chapter 1: "Let there be." Tonight we read chapters 1 and 2 together and look at the seam between them. The same world and the same humanity are told from two very different angles. By the end, we will see that both stories describe you — sometimes in the same hour.

HOW WE LABEL EVERY SOURCE

LABEL	MEANING
Direct Source	The text actually says this.
Classical Interpretation	A recognized commentator explains it this way.
Later Tradition	A later work or teacher connects the idea to the source.
Derash	A teaching reading, not the plain meaning.
Our Synthesis	A connection we are making tonight.

THE JOURNEY OF TONIGHT'S CLASS

THE TEXT	THE HINTS	THE SAGES	THE SOUL
Two accounts of creation, side by side	Two names of God, and an extra letter	One person is a whole world; prayer, partners and rest	The breath from within, and the sun and its shield

> *"And He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul." — Genesis 2:7*

PART I

Two Stories Side by Side

Genesis 1:1–2:3 tells creation in seven days and ends with Shabbat. Genesis 2:4 begins again, this time in a garden, with one human being up close.

TEXT 1 GENESIS *1:26–28*

"And God said, Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness... And God created man in His image... male and female He created them. And God blessed them... Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and master it."

DIRECT SOURCE

TEXT 2 GENESIS *2:7*

"And the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul."

DIRECT SOURCE

WHAT CHANGES BETWEEN THE TWO STORIES

	STORY ONE (1:1–2:3)	STORY TWO (2:4–25)
Name of God	God (Elokim)	The Lord God (Hashem Elokim)
How the human is made	By a word, in God's image	By hand, from dust, with God's breath
Man and woman	Created together	The man first, then the woman from his side
The human's job	Fill the earth and master it (1:28)	Work the garden and guard it (2:15)
The verdict	"Very good" (1:31)	"Not good for the man to be alone" (2:18)
It ends with	Shabbat (2:1–3)	Two people, together (2:25)

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

What is different about the two descriptions of how the first human was made? List as many differences as you can.

TEXT 3 GENESIS *2:18*

"And the Lord God said: It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper against him."

DIRECT SOURCE

▶ **LESSON**

The whole world was finished and declared "very good," and still one thing was missing. The first thing the Torah calls "not good" is not sin or darkness. It is a human being alone.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Why would a perfect world with one lonely person in it not yet be "good"?

PART II

The Hints in the Wording

Three small details in the Hebrew carry big ideas.

▶ **CLASSICAL INTERPRETATION**

Rashi on Genesis 1:1

Why does the first verse say "God (Elokim) created" and not use the name of mercy? At first it arose in God's thought to create the world with strict justice. He saw the world could not endure, so He put mercy first and joined it with justice — as it says in Genesis 2:4, "on the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven," with both names together.

▶ **LESSON**

A world of pure justice is perfect and unlivable. Chapter 1 is the perfect blueprint; chapter 2 is the world we can actually live in, because mercy has entered it.

TEXT 4 TALMUD *Berachot 61a*

In Genesis 2:7, "and He formed" is spelled with two of the letter yud. Rav Nachman bar Rav Chisda: two formations — a good inclination and an evil inclination. When the same verb describes the animals (2:19), it has only one.

DIRECT SOURCE

▶ LESSON

The extra letter is the reason you can argue with yourself. No lion ever lay awake deciding whether to be a lion.

▶ LOOK WHAT THE TORAH IS DOING HERE

Our Synthesis

Genesis 2:24 says a man "clings" to his wife. The same Hebrew root appears in Deuteronomy 4:4: "And you who cling to the Lord your God are all alive today." A possible contemporary teaching we can draw from this: learning to truly hold on to another person is training for holding on to Hashem.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Why would the Torah wait until chapter 2 — the story of the garden and the lonely man — to bring in the name of mercy?

PART III

What the Sages Teach

The Sages read chapter 2 as a manual for being human.

TEXT 5 MISHNAH

Sanhedrin 4:5

The human was created alone to teach that whoever destroys one soul is considered as if he destroyed an entire world, and whoever sustains one soul is considered as if he sustained an entire world. And for peace among people: so that no one could say, "My ancestor is greater than yours." ... Therefore each person must say: "The world was created for my sake."

DIRECT SOURCE

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

"The world was created for my sake." Is that pride, or responsibility?

▶ CLASSICAL INTERPRETATION

Rashi on Genesis 2:5, from Talmud Chullin 60b

Why had nothing grown yet? Because there was no human to recognize that rain was good. When Adam came, understood that the world needed rain, and prayed for it, the rain fell and the plants grew.

▶ LESSON

Everything was ready under the ground, waiting for a human being to ask. Some blessings in your life are sitting just below the surface, waiting for you to pray for them.

TEXT 6 TALMUD

Yevamot 63a

Rabbi Elazar on "a helper against him" (Genesis 2:18): If he merits, she is a helper. If he does not merit, she is against him.

DIRECT SOURCE

▶ OUR SYNTHESIS

Our Synthesis

Real partners are not mirrors. Sometimes the greatest help is the person who stands across from you and says "no."

▶ CLASSICAL INTERPRETATION

Rashi on Genesis 2:2

What was the world still missing after six days? Rest. When Shabbat came, rest came, and the work of creation was complete.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

If Shabbat is the last thing God created, what does that say about how you spend your seventh day?

PART IV

The Breath from Within

The mystical reading turns the two chapters inward: the breath of Genesis 2:7 is the Divine soul inside every Jew.

TEXT 7 TANYA — ***Likkutei Amarim, chapter 2***

The second soul of a Jew is "truly a part of God above," as it is written: "And He blew into his nostrils the breath of life." And as the Zohar says: one who blows, blows from within himself.

DIRECT SOURCE

▶ LESSON

Speech comes from the outside of a person; breath comes from deep inside. Everything else in creation God spoke. You, He breathed.

TEXT 8 TANYA — ***Sha'ar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 4***

"For the Lord God is a sun and a shield" (Psalms 84:12). The four-letter name is like the sun — endless giving. The name Elokim is like the shield that covers the sun, so the world can exist and is not overwhelmed.

DIRECT SOURCE

▶ DIRECT SOURCE

Sha'ar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 6

The name Elokim has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word for "nature": 86. Nature is the mask God wears.

TWO NAMES, TWO WAYS GOD MEETS THE WORLD

	ELOKIM — THE SHIELD	HASHEM — THE SUN
Story	Chapter 1	Chapter 2 (joined to Elokim)
Quality	Justice, order, nature	Mercy, closeness
How the human is made	By a word	By breath
What we feel	God hidden behind the world	God close enough to breathe into one person

▶ LATER TRADITION

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, The Lonely Man of Faith (1965)

Adam the first (chapter 1) is the builder: he masters nature and asks how the world works. Adam the second (chapter 2) is the seeker: he feels alone and asks why he is here and who will know him. God wants both.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

This past week, how many hours did you live as Adam the builder? How many as Adam the seeker?

PART V

Judaism 101: Friday Night Kiddush

Every Friday night, Jews around the world open Shabbat by reading Genesis 2:1–3 aloud over a cup of wine.

▶ WHY

Exodus 20:8; Rambam, Laws of Shabbat 29:1, 29:6

"Remember the Sabbath day, to make it holy." The Torah requires us to mark Shabbat in words; the Sages set that it be said over wine. Women and men are equally obligated (Berachot 20b).

HOW TO MAKE KIDDUSH

STEP	WHAT TO DO
1	Fill a cup with wine or grape juice (about 3.3 ounces).
2	Read Genesis 2:1–3: "The heavens and the earth were finished..."
3	Bless the wine: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine."
4	Bless the day, ending: "Blessed are You, Lord, who makes the Shabbat holy."
5	Drink at least a cheekful and share the cup.
6	Wash for bread and begin the meal. Kiddush is said where you eat.

TEXT 9 TALMUD — ***Shabbat 119b***

Whoever prays on Friday night and says "the heavens and the earth were finished" is considered by Scripture as a partner of the Holy One in the work of creation.

DIRECT SOURCE

▶ **LESSON**

God made the world in six days. Every Friday night, you finish it — by saying out loud that it was His. English is fine; it still counts.

PART VI

Torah and Our World

Three lines from chapter 2 speak straight into our lives.

▶ **NOT GOOD TO BE ALONE**

Genesis 2:18

The first "not good" is not about lacking things — Adam had a whole garden. It is about lacking someone. A screen can show you a thousand things. It cannot stand across from you.

TEXT 10 KOHELET RABBAH *7:13*

When God created the first human, He led him around the trees of the garden and said: "See how beautiful My works are. Everything I created, I created for you. Be careful not to ruin and destroy My world, for if you ruin it, there is no one after you to repair it."

DERASH

LESSON

Chapter 1 gives us the power to build — land, cities, technology, AI. Chapter 2 makes us responsible for what we build. Every builder is also a guardian.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Who in your life is alone right now, and would feel less alone if you called them this week?

CONCLUSION

Key Points

FIVE THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. The Torah tells the creation of the human twice: once as greatness (chapter 1), once as need (chapter 2).
2. The first thing the Torah calls "not good" is being alone (Genesis 2:18).
3. Mercy joined justice in chapter 2, because the world could not survive on justice alone (Rashi on 1:1).
4. Everything else God spoke; the soul He breathed, from within (Tanya, chapter 2).
5. Saying "the heavens and the earth were finished" on Friday night makes you a partner in creation (Shabbat 119b).

PERSONAL REFLECTION

When did you last let someone stand "against you" and help you anyway?

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE

This week: each morning, take one slow breath before you check your phone. Call one person who is alone. And this Friday night, make Kiddush yourself, with at least one other person at the table. Next Wednesday, share how it went.

> *"Let every soul praise God. Halleluyah." — Psalms 150:6*

Scripture is quoted or closely rendered in English. Every source is labeled. The Mitzvah Movement · One more mitzvah. That's how it starts.